

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-16WASHINGTON POST
28 December 1983

'The Problem of Terrorism Will Not Disappear if We Run From It'

United Press International

President Reagan's statement on the Beirut bombing:

I received the report of the Long commission last Friday and reviewed it thoroughly. The report draws the conclusion that the United States and its military institutions are by tradition and training inadequately equipped to deal with the fundamentally new phenomenon of state-supported terrorism. I wholeheartedly agree.

The thrust of the history of this country is that we've recognized the clear distinction between being at peace with other states and being at war.

We have never before faced a situation in which others routinely sponsor and facilitate acts of violence against us while hiding behind proxies and surrogates which claim, they claim they do not fully control.

This problem is not unique to Lebanon.

We've seen the ugly manifestation in Kuwait, the terrorist bombing in Rangoon, the senseless murder of Turkish diplomats, the attack on the pope, the bombing of our own Capitol and on the streets of London.

In the days ahead, we need to systematically redevelop an approach to this problem, recognizing that the worst outcome of all is one in which terrorists succeed in transforming an open democracy into a closed fortress.

Now one fact, though it is already obvious, the problem of terrorism will not disappear if we run from it.

This is not to say that we are not working as urgently as possible to create political conditions in Lebanon that will make it possible for us to remove our forces. But we must not delude ourselves into believing that terrorism will vanish on the happy day that our forces come home.

For terrorists to be curbed, civilized countries must begin a new effort to work together,

to share intelligence, to improve our training and security and our forces to deny a haven or legal protection for terrorist groups. And most important of all, to hold increasingly accountable those countries which sponsor terrorism and terrorist activity around the world.

The United States intends to be in the forefront of this effort. For the near term, corrective action is being urgently taken to ensure the maximum possible security of our forces.

Nearly all the measures identified by the distinguished members of the commission have implemented, or have already been implemented, I should say, and those that have not will be very quickly.

The commission report also notes that the mission of the Marines is extremely difficult. And with this, too, there can be no dispute. We recognized the fact at the beginning and were painfully reminded of it today.

But the point is that our forces have already contributed to achievements that lay the foundation for a future peace, the restoration of a central government and the establishment of an effective national Lebanese army.

We do not expect Utopia, but I believe we are on the verge of new progress toward national reconciliation and the withdrawal of foreign forces.

And let me finally say that I have soberly considered the commission's word about accountability and responsibility of authorities up and down the chain of command. And everywhere more should be done to anticipate and prepare for a dramatic terrorist assault.

We have to come to grips with the fact that today's terrorists are better armed and financed. They are more sophisticated. They are possessed by a fanatical intensity that individuals of a democratic society can only barely comprehend.

I do not believe, therefore, that the local commanders on the ground—men who have already suffered quite enough—should be punished for not fully comprehending the nature of today's terrorist threat. If there is to be blame, it properly rests here in this office and with this president. And I accept the responsibility for the bad as well as the good.

In this holiday season our minds are drawn more than ever to the Middle East, and while the violence of this region has been the cause of much of our anguish certainly over the recent years, it is also worth recalling that the three great religions in the modern world have their roots in this ancient and austere soil.

From this paradox we can take hope, and I intend to bend every effort to ensure that those who died in this tragedy can claim as their ultimate legacy the mantle of peacemaker over this troubled and vital land.